



The Birmingham News

Alabama state Sen. Lowell Barron praises Senate's passage of bill dedigned to help 7,000 new homebuyers

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Bill treats boat, car deaths similarly:

MONTGOMERY - An Alabama House committee has approved a bill that would treat fatal boating accidents involving alcoholic beverages the same as fatal traffic accidents where the driver of one of the vehicles was driving under the influence.

The House Judiciary Committee approved the bill sponsored by Rep. Barry Mask, R-Wetumpka, on Wednesday. Mask said the bill was inspired by fatal boating accidents in recent years on Lake Jordan and Lake Martin.

Sexual orientation added to hate law:

The Alabama House Judiciary Committee has approved a bill that would add crimes against people because of their sexual orientation to the state hate crimes law. The committee approved the bill Wednesday on a voice vote with no debate.

The bill by Rep. Alvin Holmes, D-Montgomery, passed the House 46-44 last year, but died when it did not come up for a vote in the Senate on the final day of the session.

Holmes said the state's current hate crimes law, passed in 1994, includes crimes against people for race, color, religion and national origin, but left out sexual orientation.

Republican lawmakers have mostly opposed the bill, saying it makes an assault on certain people worse than an attack on others.

Film tax breaks near passage:

Legislation designed to increase the number of movies, television shows and commercials made in Alabama is one step away from being approved by the Legislature.

The Senate Finance and Taxation-Education Committee voted 15-0 Wednesday for a bill that would provide tax breaks for movies, TV shows and commercials made in Alabama. The bill would make up for the lost revenue by requiring some taxpayers to pay penalties when their tax payments are late.

The bill passed the House unanimously last month. Now all it needs is approval by the Senate.

Alabama used to give tax breaks to movies made in the state, but the tax breaks expired in 2006. Since then, the number of productions in the state has declined. %%webhead%%Alabama state Sen. Lowell Barron praises Senate's passage of bill dedigned to help 7,000 new homebuyers %%ewebhead%%

Barron praises homebuyers bill:

With an unfinished Trussville subdivision as his backdrop, Sen. Lowell Barron on Wednesday touted the state Senate's passage of a housing bill designed to help 7,000 new homebuyers.

"I think this will generate excitement in the marketplace," the Fyffe Democrat said. "Nothing employs more people or touches more lives than the homebuilding industry."

Barron said the bill, which moves to the House for consideration, creates a mortgage fund to offset certain losses by investors who hold foreclosed Alabama mortgages. The fund will get \$6 million from the Alabama Capital Improvement Fund.

Buyers whose incomes do not exceed \$98,230 and whose homes are financed by the program will be required to pay a 1 percent fee at closing. The money goes back into the fund. Barron said the fee will save homeowners from having to buy mortgage insurance. Robert K. Gordon --

Manatee nears official status:

The fourth graders are at it again - writing legislation for the Alabama Legislature.

The House Agriculture and Forestry Committee on Wednesday approved a bill proposed by fourth graders at St. Ignacius Elementary School in Mobile to make the manatee Alabama's official marine mammal.

The large mammals, sometimes called "sea cows," are mostly known for swimming along the Florida coast, but in recent years have been showing up in rivers and inland waterways around Mobile.

Rep. Jim Barton of Mobile said he decided to sponsor the bill after his daughter, Georgianne, asked if her fourth-grade class could name an official state mammal. She said the students chose the manatee over the bottle-nosed dolphin.

Committee members suggested other candidates, such as the beaver, during a light-hearted debate.

Women rally for breast cancer funds:

MONTGOMERY - More than 100 women rallied in front of the Alabama State House to urge legislators to fully fund a program that screens low-income women for breast and cervical cancer. Wearing pink dresses, pink hats, pink shoes and waving pink fans, the women listened to speeches from women who have survived breast cancer because they were diagnosed early. The few men in the crowd wore pink ties.

The \$400,000 to fund the program is not funded in Gov. Bob Riley's proposed budget for the State Health Department. State Rep. Mary Sue McClurkin, who survived breast cancer, told those at the rally that early detection is often the difference between life and death for cancer patients. McClurkin is a Republican from Pelham.

Riley asks for ethics bill debate:

Gov. Bob Riley has asked the chairmen of two legislative committees to bring his bills rewriting Alabama's ethics law up for debate. The Republican governor said Wednesday he had sent the letters to the chairman of the House Judiciary Committee, Rep. Marcel Black of Tuscumbia, and the chairman of the Senate Constitution, Campaign Finance, Ethics and Election Committee, Sen. Quinton Ross of Montgomery. Ross and Black are both Democrats.

Riley's ethics reform proposals were introduced as separate bills last week in the House and Senate. The bills, among other things, would require lobbyists to fully disclose all gifts, meals and other items of value given to public officials.

HOUSE:

Judiciary Committee approved bill to increase penalties for some driving under the influence offenses. Goes to House.

Education Appropriations Committee passed a bill to establish regional autism centers at universities around the state. Goes to House.

SENATE:

Judiciary Committee approved a bill that would prohibit a judge from imposing a death sentence in a capital murder case if the jury recommended life in prison without parole. Goes to Senate.

Judiciary Committee approved a bill to provide a 180-day moratorium on foreclosures on some types of home loans. Goes to Senate.

Confirmations Committee delayed consideration of the governor's appointments to several state boards, including the Board of Agriculture and Industries and the Children's Policy Council, because of concerns about diversity.

TODAY'S AGENDA:

Senate Constitution and Elections Committee meets at 8:30 a.m. in room 727 of the State House to consider a bill requiring politicians to report the occupations of their campaign contributors.

Senate Health Committee meets at 9 a.m. in room 727 to consider legislation creating an Interagency Autism Coordinating Council.

Legislature's Contract Review Committee meets at 9 a.m. in the Joint Briefing Room.

House and Senate meet at 10 a.m.

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